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Senate

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein

Tribute to Simon Wiesenthal

- A Legacy of Justice and Tolerance -

Mrs. FEINSTEIN: Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to a man who dedicated himself to preserving the memory of the millions who perished in the Holocaust and to promoting human rights and preventing genocide.

Simon Wiesenthal lived through unimaginable tragedy and horror as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. He survived the Holocaust and spent the next 60 years of his life tracking down the war criminals who had perpetrated terrible atrocities.

During the course of World War II, Simon Wiesenthal spent four years in a series of 12 concentration camps. He was a prisoner in the Mauthausen camp when it was liberated by the United States Army on May 5, 1945.

Col. Richard Seibel who led the troops in liberating the camp described the horror that they found in a report to his superiors: "Mauthausen did exist. Man's inhumanity to man did exist. The world must not be allowed to forget the depths

to which mankind can sink, lest it should happen again."

Mr. Wiesenthal and his wife Cyla had been separated by the war, but were reunited shortly after it ended. Between the two of them, 89 family members were killed.

They decided to start a family of their own and in 1946 had a daughter, Paulinka, who went on to have children and grandchildren of her own.

Also following the war, Mr. Wiesenthal went to work for the War Crimes Office run by the Americans. This was just the start to a life-long mission to bring Nazi war criminals to justice.

He opened his own Historical Documentation Center to collect information on war criminals that was used to search them out and prosecute them for their heinous crimes. The evidence collected at the documentation center was used in prosecutions at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg in 1945 and 1946.

Credited with hunting down 1,100 major and minor Nazi war criminals since the end of World War II, Mr. Wiesenthal is most renowned for his role in the capture of Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann engineered Adolf Hitler's "Final Solution of the Jewish Problem" that led to the extermination of six million Jews as well as millions of non-Jews.

Eichmann was captured by Israeli agents in Argentina in 1960. Observed at trial in 1961, Mr. Wiesenthal later described his impression of Eichmann: "In my mind I had built up the image of a demonic superman. Instead I saw a frail, nondescript, shabby fellow in a glass cell between two Israeli policemen; they looked more colorful and interesting than he did. There was nothing demonic about him; he looked like a bookkeeper who was afraid to ask for a raise."

I am privileged to say that I did personally know Simon Wiesenthal. I received him in my home to raise money for the Wiesenthal Center in Los

Angeles. I also met with him in Vienna where I saw his small, cramped office and voluminous files.

He was one of the most amazing people; he stayed the course, never gave up, and was the greatest Nazi hunter of our time.

Dedicated in 1977 to all of the 11 million people of different nationalities, races and creeds who died in the Holocaust, the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles promotes tolerance and understanding through community involvement, educational outreach and social action, and confronts important issues such as racism, anti-Semitism, terrorism and genocide.

The Center's founder and dean, Rabbi Marvin Hier said the following about Simon Wiesenthal's legacy, "I think he'll be remembered as the conscience of the Holocaust. In a way he became the permanent representative of the victims of the Holocaust, determined to bring the perpetrators of the greatest crime to justice."

We have lost a leading voice for raising awareness and understanding of the Holocaust. It is imperative that his legacy and dedication to the millions who were killed because of their religion, race or nationality be remembered. We must do all that we can to ensure that human atrocities like this never happen again.

Let me conclude with Mr. Wiesenthal's own words,

"When history looks back, I want people to know that the Nazis weren't able to kill millions of people and get away with it...If we pardon this genocide, it will be repeated, and not only on Jews. If we don't learn this lesson, then millions died for nothing."

Thank you, Mr. President.